

'IT IS GOOD TO BE CRAZY'

Recognised as a National Umpire and a National Referee in the country then known as Czechoslovakia, in 1979 when **Karol Ziduliak** arrived in the splendidly located west coast Canadian city of Vancouver with his wife Magdalena and three daughters, Olga aged 12, Erika 11 and Eva just two years of age; for the 39 year old, refugees, it was start again.



Karol with wife Magdalena



The Blue Badge qualification is the fourth level of umpiring; the first being basically for local events, the next a national qualification, followed by the International White Badge.

In order to gain the Blue Badge, an International White Badge qualified umpire must have been active for a minimum period of two years, possessing proven experience in at least two international events during that period. Additionally, it is necessary to attend an Advanced Umpires Training Course and pass the ITTF Advanced Rules Examination.

Furthermore, it is required to gain "Meets Expectation" evaluations from at least three evaluators in a minimum of two competitions and pass an oral interview in English, either in person, via Skype or similar. A Blue Badge umpire must be competent in English.

Evaluation starts only after attending an Advanced Umpires Training course and passing the Advanced Rules Examination; if a candidate fails the Advanced Rules Examination, a period of one year must elapse before a retake. A different paper will be set.

After obtaining the first "meets expectations" the remaining three should be obtained within seven attempts. No evaluations may be from an evaluator from the umpire's own association.

The Blue Badge process must be completed within five years of attending an Advanced Umpires Training course and passing the Advanced Rules Examination.

Departing a nation that had spawned a host of world champions, to one which could not boast such a history, did not necessarily please the man who was comparatively experienced in the world of officialdom.

"I was not happy about it, but at the end it has turned out to be good for me", said Karol Ziduliak. "I learnt English much faster and passed all my exams from Club Umpire to Blue Badge Umpire at the first attempt. It has helped me also in my personal and working life."

Step by step Karol Ziduliak, whose only English words when he arrived in Canada were "thank you" and "welcome" climbed the ladder. Arriving in Vancouver, eventually he worked as a technician for the Insurance Company of British Columbia where he was responsible for building maintenance.

"Back home in Czechoslovakia I was a mechanical engineer; at one point in

charge of the maintenance of pumping stations and an oil pipeline, "Druzba", coming from the Soviet Union", explained Karol Ziduliak. "I became persona non grata after the Russian invasion in 1968, changed employer and at the end escaped in 1979. We lost our citizenship; everything was confiscated because we had betrayed our motherland. After the change in 1990 we managed to restore our citizenships, but no return of confiscated things. I was not able to get a qualification as a Mechanical Engineer in Canada; lack of Canadian experience and language."

Difficult times, table tennis proved a saviour. He umpired in many tournaments in Canadian colours. Notably he was on duty at the 1987 World Championships in New Delhi, the following year at the Olympic Games in Seoul and in 1996 at the Paralympic Games held in Atlanta. "The Seoul 1988 Olympic Games

was very special, because it was the first time that table tennis was included in Olympic Games", reminisced Karol Ziduliak. "A refugee eight years earlier, I represented my adopted country of Canada."

Subsequently, in June 2004, he became the first umpire in Canada to gain the Blue Badge. He officiated at a host of World Championships, later becoming an Evaluator for the Blue Badge Programme; his efforts being recognised by the ITTF Umpires and Referees Committee.

Additionally, after passing the Provincial and National Referees Examinations, he succeeded in 1998 in Houston when sitting the International Referees Examination.

"If I remember well out of three participants from Canada, I was the only one who passed" recalled Karol Ziduliak. "I guess many years of refereeing in my old country of Czechoslovakia paid off."

Demand high

Highly qualified, in his capacity as an International Referee, Karol Ziduliak was very much in demand in North America, in particular being on duty at Canadian Championships, Canada Winter Games, British Columbia Championships, British Columbia Winter Games plus a whole range of Canadian tournaments as well as at both the United States Closed and Open Championships.

Most notably, Karol became a familiar figure at World Veteran Championships; a career that started in 2000 when the event was held in Vancouver.

"The success of the Championships in Vancouver was thanks to the many volunteers", explained Karol Ziduliak. "I think that was one of the reasons why organizers of following World Veteran Championships invited me to work as the Deputy Referee."

He officiated in the role of Deputy Referee in 2004 in Yokohama, 2008 in Rio de Janeiro; then two years later in Hohhot and in 2016 in Alicante.

"At one point in British Columbia, we had more International Umpires and Blue Badge Umpires than the rest of Canada"

Para table tennis

However, an area in which he became particularly well known was in the Paralympic arena; his introduction being at the inaugural Para Pan American Championships staged in 2001 in Buenos Aires.

Christian Lillieroos was the Technical Delegate; Raul Calin, nowadays the ITTF Secretary-General fulfilled the role of Referee. However, there was no available Deputy Referee with an international qualification. Karol had arrived with Greg Dzioba and fitted the bill. A very efficient team was formed, later with Hernan Brizuela, a local Referee, all enjoyed the ambiance of dinner after an exhausting schedule.

"Certainly, I gladly accepted the invitation, as they say you need to be at the right place at the right time; that was the beginning of my many years of involvement with Para table tennis. It was before Para table tennis joined ITTF. It was well known that the Para tournaments used to be short of qualified umpires and in many cases qualified Referees", reminisced Karol Ziduliak. "I am sure many umpires and referees can remember that organisers quite often invited spectators to help with umpiring. I have been invited to many Para tournaments as a Referee, or Deputy Referee."

Additional to fulfilling the role of Referee, Karol Ziduliak was the Technical Officer for the Para Table Tennis Department when matters came under the umbrella of the ITTF in 2006, a role he fulfilled until 2011.

"I was involved with merging Para rules and ITTF rules during that time. Also, I qualified as a Technical Delegate for Para tournaments and have been the Technical Delegate to many Para Tournaments in South America, the United States and Europe", explained Karol Ziduliak. "I attended my last Para tournament as a Technical Director in Buenos Aires in December 2018. I must stress, that I have enjoyed volunteering for Para events very much. Para athletes



Karol Ziduliak with Greg Dzioba

and coaches appreciate officials much more than able bodied. It is a completely different atmosphere."

Home soil

Totally immersed internationally in a wide range of events, Karol Ziduliak always paid attention to his locality, British Columbia and Canada.

"In Canada, I started to work as a member of Officials Committee and later as the Officials Committee chairman. Besides doing regular duties on our committee with Art Koberstein, Darek Mikita and myself, we prepared and administered refresher exams for Umpires and Referees", stressed Karol Ziduliak. "I believe perhaps the first refresher exams in the world."

Innovating, introducing new ideas; most importantly, Karol Ziduliak spread the word. He worked tirelessly on developing and qualifying Club Umpires, Provincial Umpires, National Umpires, International Umpires and Provincial Referees.

"At one point in British Columbia, we had more International Umpires and Blue Badge Umpires than the rest of Canada. I remember we had at least two full years when every match of every tournament was umpired by a certified umpire", said Karol Ziduliak. "It made me feel good, especially when many of these officials have told me that thanks to me, they have become table tennis officials. Some call this time a golden era of table tennis officiating in British Columbia. It would not have been possible without exceptionally good support from the Board of Directors of the British Columbia Table Tennis Association; thank you for that."

Grateful to the support afforded and most grateful to his wife of some 55 years, Magdalena, whom he married on Saturday 7th May 1966 and now needs almost full-time support, Karol will only officiate if needed at events in Vancouver.

"She needs me almost full-time, because of her health issues", added Karol Ziduliak. "Now is the time to

pay back for putting up with my very extensive activities in table tennis, not only putting up, but she always encouraged me."

Present at major tournaments throughout the current century, solving problems, finding solutions, keeping the peace; it requires a sense of humour!

"I used to say, only the crazy volunteer for table tennis", smiled Karol Ziduliak. "I am proud to be one of them. I have enjoyed every minute."

It's good to be crazy!

Career Highlights

Major International Tournaments

- 2003 World Junior Championships: Santiago, Chile (Referee)
- 2005 CPISR (Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association World Championships): New London, Connecticut, USA (Referee)
- 2005 ITTF World Junior Circuit: Richmond, Canada (Referee)
- 2006 Arctic Winter Games: Kenai, Alaska, USA (Referee)
- 2019 North American Olympic Qualification: Chicago, USA (Deputy Referee)

World Veteran Championships

- 2000 Vancouver: (Referee)
- 2004 Yokohama: (Deputy Referee)
- 2008 Rio de Janeiro: (Deputy Referee)
- 2010 Hohhot: (Deputy Referee)
- 2016 Alicante: (Deputy Referee)
- Para Table Tennis
- 2005 Parapan American Championships: Brasilia, Brazil (Referee)
- 2006 Para World Championships: Montreux, Switzerland (Deputy Referee)
- 2007 Para Pan American Games: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Referee)
- 2008 Paralympic Games: Beijing, China (Deputy Referee)
- 2009 Para Pan American Championships: Margarita Island, Venezuela (Referee)
- 2011 Para Pan American Games: Guadalajara, Mexico (Deputy Referee)
- 2015 Para Pan American Games: Toronto, Canada (Deputy Referee)
- 2016 Para United States Open: Las Vegas, USA (Deputy Referee)